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ABSTRACT

This guide offers suggestions to high school students with and without disabilities as they begin to prepare for careers. It focuses on the variety of work-based learning experience available. These include informational interviews with people working in fields of interest; job shadowing in an occupational area of interest; service learning in volunteer community positions; independent study in which academic credit is earned for work experience; and internships. Reasons for participating in work-based learning opportunities are followed by a discussion of steps to take in relation to the various team members including your school, your family, community resources, and mentors. Finally, the paper briefly describes two work-based federally supported learning programs: (1) school-to-work, a program under the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, which offers school-based learning, work-based learning, and connecting activities and (2) High School/High Tech, a community-based program that encourages students with disabilities to pursue careers in the technology industry. A resource list identifies 16 Web sites that provide information on the University of Washington DO-IT project. (DB)

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Learn and Earn: Tips for Teens
How High School Students Can Prepare for Careers

University of Washington

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Learn and Earn: Tips for Teens

DO-IT

How high school students can prepare for careers

As a high school student, you may think that you have plenty of time to decide on your career path and to acquire the skills you will need to market yourself successfully. Some people believe that completing an academic program will guarantee them a job. This is not always true. What can you do to make yourself attractive to a future employer?

You need to start exploring your career interests and developing your job skills now! In today's competitive job market it is essential that you possess relevant skills and experiences that will set you apart from everyone else. Work-based learning experiences can help you focus your career interests and develop job skills. Many high schools make work-based learning activities available to you.

What is Work-based Learning?

Below are descriptions of typical activities and services your school may offer. They all provide opportunities in work settings. Check them out and take advantage of them!

Informational Interview
In informational interviews, you meet with people working in your fields of interest to ask questions about their particular occupations, qualification requirements, job duties, and companies. These interviews help you gain insights into your career interests from the people who do those jobs every day.

Job Shadowing
In a job shadow, you visit a business to observe the everyday functions of an occupational area of interest to you. Experiences vary in time from one hour to a full day depending on the amount of time employers can provide as well as your interest and school requirements. Job shadowing experiences offer you opportunities for career exploration and provide you with a realistic view of the day-to-day activities of specific jobs.

Service Learning
Service learning programs offer opportunities to be a concerned, informed, and productive citizen by providing community service in non-paid, volunteer positions. These volunteer programs increase the relevancy of your academic learning as you apply knowledge and skills while making a contribution to your local community.

Independent Study
Your school may allow you to earn academic credit for work experiences. In an independent study option you would work one-on-one with a teacher, or other educator, to develop your work project for credit. Work experience, coupled with written work, such as a journal or essay, is an excellent way to practice, demonstrate, and expand the skills you've learned in school.

Internship
An internship is an intensive learning experience that is not part of a regular class. You work in a supervised learning situation with an employer doing planned learning activities. An internship can give you a broad overview of an occupational field, while providing you with opportunities to experience work responsibilities and develop work skills. Some internships are paid; some are not paid.

Why Should I Participate in Work-based Learning?

Work-based learning experiences, such as job shadows and internships, offer you opportunities to practice skills and to network with potential employers. However, for students with disabilities, work-based learning experiences offer additional benefits. They give you a chance to determine if you can perform the essential functions of particular jobs. They give you opportunities to practice disclosing your disability and requesting accommodations from an employer. In addition, you can test which accommodations work best for you. You develop self-advocacy skills through work-based learning. It's a great way to get off to a running start on your career path!

Who are Members of My Team for Success?

As a young adult, finding work-based learning experiences on your own can be challenging. You may be unfamiliar with your accommodation needs and the process of locating work-based learning opportunities and jobs, filling out applications and forms, and speaking with employers. Reach out and ask for support from those who care about your success.

Below are some specific steps you can take with potential members of your team for success – your school, your family, community resources, and mentors.

Your School

- Visit your career center, counseling/advising office, or School-to-Work program, to find work-based learning opportunities.
- Participate in available orientations, workshops, and individual counseling sessions to improve your job-search skills.
- Discuss the types of work setting accommodations you may need with coordinators and your guidance counselors; also, ask them for suggestions.
- If you have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), make sure mainstream work-based learning and career preparation activities are included; talk with your IEP team about activities that interest you.
- Work with your teacher, counselor or transition specialist to develop self-advocacy skills, options for disclosing your disability, and assistive technology resources.

Your Family

- Talk to your family members about the world of work. Those who have worked many years may be your best resources!
- Get assistance in understanding the Social Security (SS) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) systems. Contact your local SSA office and request an appointment with a benefits counselor or access the SSA Web site at *http://www.ssa.gov/* .
- Learn to advocate in your Individual Education Plan (IEP) development and in receiving appropriate accommodations at school and work. Ask a parent or supporter to help identify a strategy.
- Start networking. Begin with people you know (family members, employers, co-workers, friends, neighbors, etc.). Talk to these people about work experiences you are seeking. They may know of new leads or help expand your network further.

Community Resources

- Contact the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). DVR may be able to aid you in employment preparation and placement. DVR can also refer you to community rehabilitation programs and Projects With Industry (PWI) programs.
- Access other local support networks and disability service organizations.

Mentors

- Seek out someone you admire to be your mentor. Someone who is in college or pursuing a career is a good choice. Mentors can share valuable experiences, insights, and resources with you. They can also provide encouragement and support as you make decisions related to your career preparation.

How Can You Get Started?

C is for Careers. Think about what interests you. Be imaginative, then narrow it down.

A is for Academics. Determine which academic programs best suit your career goals.

R is for Research. Research careers that spark your interests, maximize your strengths, and minimize your weaknesses.

EE is for Experiential Education. Practice job search skills. Apply for internships. Ask for informational interviews, and try other work-based learning opportunities.

RS is for Relevant Skills. Use on-the-job experience to learn practical "real world" skills. Apply what you've learned in school to the workplace. Test which accommodations work best for you.

What are Some Program Options?

School-to-Work and High School/High Tech are examples of two work-based learning programs that may be available in your area.

School-to-Work

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 was signed by President Clinton. All School-to-Work programs are based on the concept that education is most beneficial for future careers when students apply what they learn to real work situations. Although programs vary in structure from state to state, each School-to-Work model has three core elements:

- School-based Learning – classroom instruction based on high academic and occupational skill standards.
- Work-based Learning – career exploration, work experience, structured training, and mentoring at job sites.
- Connecting Activities – courses integrating classroom and on-the-job instruction, matching students with participating employers, and training mentors.

More information on The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 can be found at *http://www.stw.ed.gov/general/general.htm*

High School/High Tech

DO-IT partners with the City of Seattle and Seattle Public Schools to coordinate the High School/High Tech program in Western Washington. This program is funded by the U.S. Dept. of Labor (grant # E-9-4-1-0087). High School/High Tech is a community-based partnership of parents, educators, rehabilitation professionals, and business representatives. The partnership combines site tours, job shadowing, internships, and mentoring to encourage students with disabilities to pursue careers in the technology industry. To learn more about High School/High Tech programs nationwide, visit http://www.dol.gov/dol/odep/public/programs/high.htm.

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Resources

Use these Web sites to continue gathering information about work-based learning opportunities, job-search skills, employers, accommodations, legal issues, and career planning. The resources are out there. You just have to use them. You can DO-IT!

- DO-IT CAREERS
  http://www.washington.edu/doit/Careers/
- ADA and Disability Information
  http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm
- Career Magazine
  http://www.careermag.com/
- Career Planning Process
  http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/student_affairs/career/process/
- Facts about transition from School to Work and Community Life
  http://thearc.org/faqs/qa-idea-transition.html
- High School/High Tech
  http://www.dol.gov/odep/programs/high.htm
- Job Accommodation Network
  http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/
- Mapping Your Future
  http://mapping-your-future.org/
- Marriott Foundation
  http://www.marriottfoundation.org/
- National Transition Alliance for Youth with Disabilities
  http://www.dssc.org/nta/textonly/index_t.htm
- One-Stop Career Center
  http://www.wa.gov/esd/1stop/
- Online Career Center
  http://www.occ.com/
- Parents and the STW Transition of Special Needs Youth
  http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content4/special.needs.trans.html
- School-to-Work Fact Sheets
  http://www.stw.ed.gov/factsht/facttoc.htm
- State and Local School-to-Work Links
  http://www.stw.ed.gov/wwwsites.htm
- Washington State Work-Based Learning Resource Center
  http://www.wa-wbl.com/

Videotape

A 13-minute videotape, *Learn and Earn: Tips for Teens*, may be ordered by sending a check for $25.00 to DO-IT.

About DO-IT

The University of Washington helps individuals with disabilities transition to college and careers through DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology). Primary funding for the DO-IT project is provided by the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and the State of Washington. The DO-IT CAREERS/K-12 (Careers, Academics, Research, Experiential Education and Relevant Skills/K-12) project serves to increase the number of high school students with disabilities in work-based learning experiences. This publication was developed with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs (#H324M990010). However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. For more information, to be placed on the mailing list, or to request materials in an alternative format, contact:

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